



The Alabama Veteran

Bob Riley
Governor

SPRING 2007

W. Clyde Marsh
Commissioner

DATES TO REMEMBER

- Armed Forces Day—
May 19, 2007
- Memorial Day—
May 28, 2007
- American Village Blue
Star Salute —
May 28, 2007
- Let Freedom Ring
Ceremonies—
June 29, 2007
- Board of Veterans
Affairs Meets—
July 13, 2007

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Commissioner's Corner

On March 6, 2007, President Bush created the Task Force for Returning Global War on Terror (GWT) Heroes. The purpose of the Task Force was to improve the delivery of federal services and benefits to GWT service-members and veterans. As part of this Task Force, the DOD and VA agreed to develop a joint process of assigning disability ratings used to determine fitness for military retention, level of disability for retirement, and VA disability compensation.

The Task Force report also provided 25 recommendations to improve benefits and services to returning military men and women. This government wide action plan contains steps for individual department or agency commitment that incorporates cooperative interaction among those providing complimentary services.

The ADVA has created a point of contact to assist those military members in transition that are on active duty or in veteran military medical or rehabilitation centers. State agencies as well as USDVA have had little or no visibility of these heroes for weeks, months and sometimes years after their release and return to their home states.

VA Secretary James Nicholson has agreed to share (with the individual's consent) the necessary information for state agencies to contact those returning veterans and provide state specific information, points of contact and assistance with the federal claims process prior to their release from military treatment facilities.

This initiative will fill a critical gap and help prevent veterans from falling through the cracks. Mr. Marshall Smith, Assistant Director for Claims has been designated as the ADVA Coordinator for Seamless Transition and Severely Injured and Wounded Veterans.

Although a significant effort is being provided to help the enormous number of severely injured and wounded veterans returning home, the ADVA will remain committed to taking care of all veterans both war and peacetime. Alabama's heroes will not be forgotten!



L-R: Secretary Nicholson and Commissioner Marsh

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VA Performance Report Among Best

WASHINGTON – Continuing its commitment to give veterans a clear, meaningful view of how the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is performing, VA was recently rated by an independent research center as having one of the best annual performance reports in the federal sector for the eighth year in a row.

Since 2000, the Mercatus Center of George Mason University has examined the performance and accountability reports issued annually by federal agencies. This year, VA tied for second-best in the federal government receiving 51 points on a 60-point scale.

Called Eighth Annual Performance Report Scorecard: Which Federal Agencies Best Inform the Public?, the new Mercatus study found VA's reports are "rich in information on efforts to improve programmatic and managerial performance."

VA published its latest performance and accountability report in November 2006. It documents VA's progress toward ensuring that America's veterans and their families receive timely, compassionate, high-quality care and benefits. The Department's report can be found on the internet at <http://www.va.gov/budget/report>.

ADVA 2007 Legislative Reception

On March 21st, the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs hosted a legislative reception for members of the Alabama Legislature. The event kicked off with a welcome and opening remarks by Commissioner Clyde Marsh. During his remarks, Commissioner Marsh thanked those members of the legislature who were in attendance and provided a brief overview of the legislative initiatives that the department has proposed during the current legislative session. The Veterans Benefits Initiative (VBI) is a package of additional or enhanced proposed state benefits that, if implemented, would provide Alabama's veterans with additional benefits as well as new automobile tags for veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

At the conclusion of his remarks, Commissioner Marsh invited each legislator in attendance to make a few personal remarks. Each of those present expressed their commitment to Alabama's men and women in uniform and ensured a solid base of support for this most current generation of veterans, as well as those veterans who have served our state and nation so nobly in the past.

The legislative reception was made possible by donations from the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Paralyzed Veterans of America.

Phase I of Feasibility Study Completed

The Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs was briefed on March 23rd by their contractor, Health Dimension Group on the findings and recommendations determined in Phase I of the Feasibility Study of Healthcare Needs of Alabama Veterans. The study began last fall and is expected to be concluded by mid-May. The basic function of the study was to determine the demographic projections for future aging veterans, the future need for long-term care services, the need to develop new programs, and a determination of cost factors for implementing identified projects.

The project tasks included demographic and demand assessment, current veteran's homes assessment, a statewide survey of Alabama's veterans, as well as an analysis of alternatives for consideration. The study categorized the information by county groups utilizing ADVA district divisions. The study showed that although the total population of veterans was declining, the 80 and older population was increasing. There is a clear and crucial need for additional veteran's home beds through 2030. The unmet demand was greatest in District III which includes Jefferson and Shelby Counties and the counties to their west.

The study also revealed a need for domiciliary care, which is for more independent veterans that are not yet ready for continual 24/7 skilled care which is currently provided. The study also revealed an increasing number of women veterans through 2030 that will impact the veteran's homes program. It is recommended any new construction give focus on designing for a more diverse population of both male and female veterans rather than the dominantly male veteran homes of the past.

The study also looked at the functionality of the Bill Nichols State Veterans Home in Alexander City, the William F. Green State Veterans Home in Bay Minette, and the Tut Fann State Veterans Home in Huntsville. The study identified a need for expansion of space for the Alzheimer's Program in each of the homes and a need for additional private rooms and dayroom space at the Bill Nichols Home.

Phase II will be completed in May and will provide the financial and capital outlay requirements for construction, remodeling, and programming. Our priority is to construct a 180 bed nursing facility near Birmingham, which would include at least 50 beds dedicated to Alzheimer's care, an 80-bed domiciliary on the same campus, and add additional space for enhanced quality programming to the other three homes.

The federal VA provides Construction Grants which would cover 65% of the total cost. The state must show a commitment by the State for the 35% matching funds to consider a project for funding. Once Phase II is completed we will move forward with locating a site for construction of the fourth home and request funding.

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Robert J. "Bob" Hewitt—Blountsville

Vietnam Veterans of America

Ken Rollins—Oxford

VA Searching for Last Doughboys of World War I

WASHINGTON -- With the number of known living American veterans of World War I now standing at four, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is seeking public assistance in determining whether others are still alive.

"These veterans have earned the gratitude and respect of the nation" said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson. "We are coming to the end of a generation that helped bring the United States to the center of the international arena." Nicholson noted that VA usually knows about the identity and location of veterans only after they come to the department for benefits. None of the four known surviving World War I veterans have been on the VA benefits rolls.

The Secretary asks members of the general public who know of a surviving World War I veteran to contact VA. To qualify as a World War I veteran, someone must have been on active duty between April 6, 1917 and Nov. 11, 1918. VA is also looking for surviving Americans who served in the armed forces of allied nations.

Information about survivors can be e-mailed to ww1@va.gov, faxed to 202-273-6702, or mailed to the Office of Public Affairs, Department of Veterans Affairs (80), 810 Vermont Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20420.

About 4.7 million men and women served in the U.S. armed forces during World War I. About 53,000 died in combat, with another 204,000 wounded.

The four known surviving World War I veterans are John Babcock, 102, from Puget Sound, WA.; Frank Buckles, 106, Charles Town, WV; Russell Coffey, 108, North Baltimore, OH; and Harry Landis, 107, Sun City Center, FL.

Babcock is an American who served in the Canadian Army. The other three survivors were in the U.S. Army.

National Commander Visits Alabama

American Legion National Commander, Paul Morin, recently visited each of Alabama's three State Veterans Homes, as well as the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs Headquarters in Montgomery.

Commander Morin has been the American Legion National Commander since August 31, 2006. In addition to his duties as National Commander, he serves as Superintendent of the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke, Massachusetts. His special interest on this trip was to observe how Alabama takes care of its veterans.

Before leaving Alabama, Commander Morin stated that he was impressed by the commitment that the Alabama Legislators, the State of Alabama Board of Veterans Affairs, and the Commissioner and his staff have made to the veterans of the State of Alabama.

Mr. Morin was accompanied on his tour by State Commander Willis Frazier and other State of Alabama American Legion dignitaries.



L-R: Lavon Henley, Green Home Representative, Commander Paul Morin, and American Legion State Commander Willis Frazier

Painted Murals at Bill Nichols State Veterans Home

“WOW” has been the response that Bill Nichols State Veterans Home has received from residents, sponsors, staff, and visitors over the new murals recently painted in the dayrooms of the three floors.

Brenda McMath, an area artist, has spent three weeks improving these areas. The dayrooms are used for residents to socialize and spend time doing activities. The murals provide additional visual stimulation for the residents.

Furthermore, every time the murals are looked at, spectators find new and exciting details that were previously unnoticed. Ms. McMath added numerous touches in her artwork including lady bugs, a cork on the end of a fishing rod, frogs and various birds and fish.



Scenic mural by local artist Brenda McMath

We have also included a large fish aquarium on the 4th floor. Many of the residents residing on this floor have been diagnosed with Dementia, a disease affecting memory and behavioral aspects of the brain. With the visual stimulation of the aquarium, residents are able to recognize scenery from their past. This project was made possible from funds donated to the facility from various individuals as well as veterans organizations.

Honoring Our Heroes - Let Freedom Ring Ceremonies!

The Alabama Legislature, the Alabama Sports Festival and the Governor's Commission on Physical Fitness will honor all Alabama military personnel who have been deployed or are presently deployed in Operations Noble Eagle, Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. This event will take place during the Alabama Sports Festival XXV Opening Ceremonies on Friday, June 29, 2007 at 6:45 p.m. in the Birmingham-Jefferson Complex. This event will be televised live statewide.

A specially minted bronze medal will be presented to all qualifying service members present. Families of service members killed in action during any of these three major conflicts will be honored and specially minted bronze liberty bell medal will be given to them in honor of the supreme sacrifice that they made. Any Alabama service member that is presently in Afghanistan or Iraq may be represented by a family member to receive the specially minted bronze Liberty Bell medal.

Service members must register in order to participate and receive a recognition medal. Registration can be made online at www.alagames.com. Registration can also be made by faxing a completed registration form to 334-280-0988 or by mailing it to Honoring Our Heroes Registration, P.O. Box 20327, Montgomery, AL 36120-0327.

Registration forms can be obtained at any county veterans' service office. The ADVA encourages all service-members to support and/or participate as your military service allows. There is no nobler cause than to recognize the great service and sacrifice of our veterans – our heroes.

History of Memorial Day

Memorial Day, also known as Decoration Day, is a day set aside to honor and remember those that have died in our nation's service. The origin of the holiday dates back to the Civil War in which it was first widely observed on May 30, 1868, to commemorate the sacrifices of Civil War soldiers.

This celebration was inspired by local observances of the day that took place in several towns throughout America after the Civil War ended. Although several Northern and Southern cities claim to be the birthplace of Memorial Day, President Lyndon Johnson, declared Waterloo, NY, the official birthplace of Memorial Day.

In 1971, Congress declared Memorial Day a national holiday to be celebrated the last Monday in May. For more information regarding the history of Memorial Day, visit <http://www.historychannel.com/exhibits/memorial>.

Operation Family Shield Extended

The Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education has recently announced that the Tuition Waiver Program for eligible dependents of activated members of the Reserve Components will be extended indefinitely due to the numerous active duty extensions of Alabama Reserve Component service members. The tuition waiver program only applies to the state's two year colleges and waives actual tuition costs only. For more information on this benefit, please contact your unit education representative or your school's tuition assistance office.

Shelby County 2007 Senior Picnic

In recognition of the esteemed Senior Veterans of Shelby County, the Shelby County M4A, RSVP, and Veterans Service Office cordially invites you to attend the 2007 Senior Picnic. The picnic will be held Thursday, May 24, 2007, 9:00 am to 1:00 pm at the American Village in Montevallo, Alabama.



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